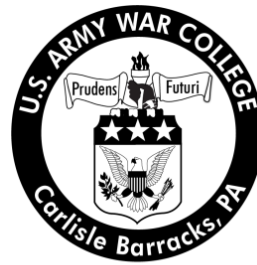


Is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Sustainable?

by

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United States Army War College
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ABSTRACT

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During the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was widely viewed as essential for the security of NATO member-states. After the Cold War, many European nations continued to look to NATO as a guarantor of their security. Post-Cold War, NATO broadened its involvement beyond Western Europe, while absorbing several states from the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. NATO has evolved from an alliance that was primarily defensive in nature, and European focused, to a more globally focused defensive alliance.

A question often asked since the end of the Cold War is, "Can NATO be sustained?" While the U.S. President has labeled NATO as the "indispensable organization" and former Secretary of Defense Gates have stressed its importance to both individual and global security, they also express concern about its future. NATO can be sustained. Ultimately, however, NATO itself must convince its own members that NATO is necessary for their security. Failure to do so may threaten NATO's future existence.

IS THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO) SUSTAINABLE?

NATO has been a very effective deterrent for armed conflict in Europe since its inception in 1949. Under the ominous cloud of tensions and antagonism due to the Cold War, NATO was widely viewed as necessary to the security of many European nations. After the Cold War, many pundits rushed to opine that NATO was a relic of the Cold War, and it had no future.

One quote that captured this sentiment follows.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO's *raison d'être* seemingly disappeared overnight. An alliance that had been the bulwark of stability and security in Europe for 40 years suddenly found itself facing an uncertain future. Realist commentators produced a flurry of articles and statements predicting NATO's demise in the absence of the Soviet threat. In November 1990, Kenneth Waltz proclaimed before the US Senate that 'NATO is a disappearing thing'. Waltz's thoughts were echoed by John Mearsheimer who predicted NATO's dissolution, suggesting that while it might still exist on paper, it would cease to function as an alliance. Only three years later, Waltz was forced to reassess his predictions, claiming that 'NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are.'¹

Russia also believed that NATO would fold with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.² History has proven that NATO could survive beyond the Cold War, and even prosper. The learned pundits who predicted NATO's demise were wrong. Some twenty years after the end of the Cold War, timely and important questions arose as NATO was crafting its 2010 Strategic Concept. "Can NATO be sustained?" and "Is NATO essential to its member-states' security?"³ The answers to these two questions are intertwined.

NATO can be sustained. Nevertheless, if NATO member-states' populations do not believe that NATO is essential to their security, NATO's future and existence may be called into question by its member-states' populations. NATO member-states are by

definition democracies, and in democracies, it is not sufficient that the government understand the necessity of sustaining a defensive alliance, it is also essential that the publics understand and support it as well. It is easier to support America's and European countries' investment in NATO when their populations believe that NATO is essential to their safety and protection.

NATO itself believes that it remains essential to its member-states' security. NATO's current stance is articulated in its 2010 Strategic Concept. The preface of this document declares, "We, the Heads of State and Government of the NATO nations, are determined that NATO will continue to play its unique and essential role in ensuring our common defence and security."⁴ NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept further affirms, "The citizens of our countries rely on NATO to defend Allied nations, to deploy robust military forces where and when required for our security, and to help promote common security with our partners around the globe."⁵

As a matter of U.S. policy, America also believes that NATO is essential to America's security. The U.S. is a founding member of NATO and has participated in it for more than 60 years, while contributing American forces, equipment, and vast sums of funds.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, former members of the defunct Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact believed that NATO remained necessary and they looked to NATO to guarantee their permanent transition to a modern democracy.⁶ Professor Arthur Rachwald, Department of Political Science, U.S. Naval Academy, stated, "The disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, the main protector of totalitarianism in Central Europe, had created new expectations that NATO, the most important champion of

democracy, would not only continue to exist, but would also extend the benefits of its presence to all of Europe.”⁷ While it could be debated whether NATO was the most important champion of democracy immediately after the end of the Cold War, most would agree that NATO is and was an important champion of democracy.

“NATO added new members [from the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact] and periodically updated its strategic doctrine to focus on the emerging threats and structural modifications needed to carry out new missions.”⁸ The primary emerging European security challenge was the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the emerging threats were transnational terrorist or extremist groups. Later, these threats grew to include access to space, cyber-attacks, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and ballistic-missile technologies. In addition to NATO’s old task of collective defense, its new missions/tasks include crisis prevention, conflict management, stability, and peace-keeping/enforcement operations, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, counter-terrorism, and other military interventions as required.

Today’s global security challenges are more complex, costly, and perhaps, more unpredictable than those NATO has engaged in to date, especially when potential rogue states and actors may or do possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD), e.g. North Korea, and Iran. Collective security and defense in Europe and abroad remain necessary despite the end of the Cold War. NATO remains necessary for the security of its member-states, but increasingly the threat may emanate from outside of Europe, making collective security of NATO members inextricable from the security of some NATO partners and non-NATO countries, as has been recently evidenced in Afghanistan.

America, like all members of NATO, may be required at some point to supply NATO with military forces and materiel. Like all member-states, America's fate is inextricably intertwined with the fates of other members; if one is attacked, all are obligated to respond.⁹ In a volatile and complex security environment, it is impossible to act unilaterally for any period of time; an alliance such as NATO is, therefore, an asset to all member-states and an essential component of their collective security. It is, however, easier to sustain America's and Europe's investment in NATO when its populations believe that NATO is essential to their safety and protection.

NATO member-states' populations recognize that participation in NATO requires financial commitment. However, funding NATO commitments can compete with other member-states' domestic programs. This can result in some governments not expending what America and other NATO member-states believe is adequate funding for their NATO commitments. The former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, offered NATO a strong caution. Gates said, 'Future U.S. political leaders, those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me, may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost.'¹⁰

Today, it is a particularly acute period for NATO, as Europe has been deeply affected by the recent European debt crisis. U.S. and European financial challenges may result in hard choices regarding NATO participation. NATO member-states must balance funding their NATO commitments with other state costs such as social programs for their populations. Hence, NATO participation must be viewed as necessary and providing value to its member-states' populations. NATO member nations may be forced to make larger budget cuts, and defense spending will be a

prime target for budget cuts.¹¹ Many NATO member countries are already giving up significant parts of their military prowess, e.g. Belgium and the Netherlands are phasing out their main battle tank capability.¹² As America, and Europe face military budget and force reductions, burden-sharing will only be aggravated, leading to a less robust and responsive NATO. For example, Britain and U.S. reductions in their armed forces will lead to less “high-quality” deployable forces.¹³

“Crisis-induced austerity moves have put downward pressure on defence spending. . . .”¹⁴ “With Europe’s finances in flames, the eye of many of its leaders is on domestic politics.”¹⁵ The European financial crisis has caused political unrest and discomfort in some countries. In France, there were widespread protests when the French government raised the national retirement age from 60 to 62, while Germany Chancellor’s Angela Merkel’s support of a bailout of Greece and the establishment of a 750 billion Euro fund which was established to protect vulnerable Eurozone economies were considered “controversial”.¹⁶

NATO appears very cognizant of the funding tensions. In its 2010 Strategic Concept, NATO states, “It [Strategic Concept] commits NATO to continuous reform towards a more effective, efficient and flexible Alliance, so that our taxpayers get the most security for the money they invest in defence.”¹⁷

In an effort to answer the question regarding the future of NATO, this paper will review and analyze empirical data such as polls and surveys. Zsolt Nyiri, the author of the key findings of the Transatlantic Trends surveys for 2010 and 2011, stated, “support for NATO has often been considered a general measure of commitment for membership

in the Western alliance.”¹⁸ The selected polls/surveys will cover multiple years and will primarily entail responses from NATO member-states’ populations.

Prior to reviewing the polling data, a contextual review of NATO will be provided. It is important to provide context for the question posed regarding NATO’s sustainability.

A look at NATO both prior to and post-Cold War will help to understand why many NATO member-states’ populations believe that NATO remains essential to their security. For many years, NATO was primarily focused on Europe. NATO’s establishment coincided with the emergence of the Soviet Union and its allies as a threat and competitor with the West for global power and influence. The Soviet Union had aggressively and formally absorbed several Eastern European countries into the Soviet sphere under the Brezhnev doctrine of “limited sovereignty”¹⁹ In 1946, Stalin made a “. . . deeply disturbing speech . . . when he openly recommitted the Soviet Union to inexorable conflict with the capitalist west.”²⁰

Bernard Brodie maintained that NATO was a direct outgrowth of the ‘rape’ of Czechoslovakia’ in 1948 and a response to the ‘blockade’ of Berlin which had been overcome that same year.²¹ “. . . the Warsaw Pact, [was] imposed by Moscow on its European satellites in 1955 in response to West German membership in NATO [and] provided an institutional framework for the Soviet empire.”²²

Two other key historical aspects in play at the time of NATO’s formation were the emergence of nuclear weapons, and America’s primacy as the world’s most powerful military. Shortly after World War II, the Soviets were considered a most formidable and aggressive military force with a burgeoning nuclear capability. Immediately after World War II, there were only two nations which possessed nuclear weapons. America had

used two atomic bombs during World War II, and the Soviet Union tested its first nuclear device in October 1949.²³ Through NATO, during the Cold War and beyond, NATO member-states were afforded nuclear deterrence, and significant nuclear response capabilities, if deterrence failed.

The specter of nuclear weapons remains in Europe today, despite the end of the Cold War. Russia retained its nuclear weapons after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while former Soviet Republics such as Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan returned their nuclear weapons to Russia.

In NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, it states,

Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy. The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.²⁴

Today, other than Russia, NATO's Western European member-states are the only European nations with nuclear weapons in Europe. One caveat, not all NATO member-states possess nuclear weapons. None of NATO's Eastern European member-states own nuclear weapons. Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Turkey possess and maintain warplanes for nuclear delivery, and store nuclear weapons on their territory.²⁵ Other NATO member-states, France and Great Britain, possess their own nuclear weapons.²⁶ The nuclear capabilities of NATO member-states in Europe are greatly strengthened by America's overwhelming nuclear arsenal.

In comparison to the largest non-NATO military in Europe, Russia's active armed forces (1,200,000), NATO-Europe's largest forces are: Turkey, 612,900, France, 362,485, Italy, 293,202, U.K., 224,500, Spain, 177,000, and Germany 148,996.²⁷ While the U.S. has 1,477,896 active military forces, it has a scant 40,000 forces in Europe today, and is looking to make deeper cuts over the next three years.²⁸ During the height of the Cold War, the U.S. had 200,000 forces stationed in Europe.²⁹ This reduction in U.S. forces in Europe has given some NATO member-states cause for concern. Later, this will be discussed in greater detail.

NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept states that a "conventional threat" is "low",

However, the conventional threat cannot be ignored. Many regions and countries around the world are witnessing the acquisition of substantial, modern military capabilities with consequences for international stability and Euro-Atlantic security that are difficult to predict. This includes the proliferation of ballistic missiles, which poses a real and growing threat to the Euro-Atlantic area.³⁰

The following will offer some context as to how NATO sees the current global threat environment. NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept highlights the following as current threats:

Terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity more broadly. Extremist groups continue to spread to, and in, areas of strategic importance to the Alliance, and modern technology increases the threat and potential impact of terrorist attacks, in particular if terrorists were to acquire nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological capabilities. Instability or conflict beyond NATO borders can directly threaten Alliance security, including by fostering extremism, terrorism, and trans-national illegal activities such as trafficking in arms, narcotics and people. Cyber attacks are becoming more frequent, more organised and more costly in the damage that they inflict on government administrations, businesses, economies and potentially also transportation and supply networks and other critical infrastructure; they can reach a threshold that threatens national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity, security and stability. Foreign militaries and intelligence services, organised criminals, terrorist and/or extremist groups can each be the source of such attacks.³¹

NATO has many capabilities that can respond to the above-cited threats. The security challenges cited above by NATO affect all of its member nations and the entire global community. However, it is sometimes difficult for NATO member-state populations to see the above threats as presenting an immediate and persistent danger. By contrast, during the Cold War, an inescapable sense of peril permeated Western Europe due to the perceived “Red threat” and its “hordes”.

Under NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept, it “. . . does not consider any country to be its adversary.”³² However, Russia is one non-NATO member European nation with a large military and nuclear weapons. Russian officials have repeatedly stated that Russia views NATO as a threat to Russia. Post-Cold War, Russia has also been the only European nuclear power to commit aggression against another country (Georgia) in Central Asia.

Over time, there may be an increased public perception that NATO is essential to the security of NATO member-states. This in turn may lead even greater support for NATO in NATO member countries. America’s publicly stated emphasis on the Pacific, coupled with its large troop reductions in Europe, has heightened some Eastern European NATO nations’ security concerns. Some NATO member-states have a sense that America is abandoning Europe, and that security will decline in Europe due to America’s armed forces reductions in Europe.³³ The Pentagon has tried to calm the concerns of Eastern European nations.³⁴

General Mieczyslaw Cieniuch, Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, said, ‘I don’t think that we have direct threats emanating from any of our neighbors, but the absence of U.S. troops in Europe might create some problems in the

future. . . We [Poland] are a border country of the [NATO] Alliance.’³⁵ While General Cienuch does not specifically state that Russia is the threat that he is concerned about, Russia and Poland have had some recent tense moments when Poland had agreed to station U.S. missiles in Poland as part of a larger NATO missile defense initiative. On November 22, 2011, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warned that Russia would deploy “short-range Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, a Baltic Sea region bordering Poland, and place weapons in other areas in Russia's west and south to target U.S. missile defense sites.”³⁶

NATO membership for Ukraine or Georgia could result in heightened tension or military conflict between NATO member-states and Russia. This could have either a positive or negative effect on NATO’s sustainability. Some NATO member-states’ publics may not support a NATO-Russian conflict over admission of Georgia or Ukraine. One indicator may be seen in a poll which will be reviewed below, which suggests that some NATO member-states’ publics are unwilling to support Georgia’s and Ukraine’s admission to NATO if doing so would risk relations with Russia.

Russian officials have publicly expressed their concerns regarding Ukraine’s and Georgia’s possible accession into NATO.³⁷ In 2008, after a meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister, Frederick Reinfeldt, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said, “The expansion of NATO infrastructure towards our [Russia’s] borders is causing us [Russia] concern. . . . NATO is not simply a political bloc, it is a military bloc.”³⁸ In 2008, Putin warned Ukraine not to join NATO or Russia would target Kiev with missiles.³⁹

Also in 2008, Russia and Ukraine had some tense moments as Ukraine had announced that it was willing to accept Western missile defenses and early-warning

systems.⁴⁰ Russia claimed to view the prospects of such missile deployments as war-like provocations.

It would be very difficult for any single NATO member-state to defeat Russia militarily, especially in an armed conflict waged on Russian territory; hence, an effective military response to armed conflict with Russia would almost certainly require that a number of NATO member-states would have to respond. Under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty of 1949,

The Parties [NATO member-states] agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.⁴¹

NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine may be possible under NATO's "Open Door" policy, which NATO has maintained in accordance with Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty).⁴² This policy affords membership to NATO to those nations who are invited and qualify for membership. At the NATO summit in Bucharest, 2008, NATO issued a communique detailing the road to NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine.⁴³ The communique stated,

NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. . . [Membership Access Program] MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today, we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications. . . Foreign Ministers have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia.⁴⁴

In NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, it restated its "... firm commitment to keep the door to NATO open to all European democracies that meet the standards of membership, because enlargement contributes to our goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace."⁴⁵

Russia's ability to influence NATO's stated desire to add Georgia and Ukraine as members may be strengthened by Russia's ability to leverage its energy supply, which many European nations depend on. A 2009 Transatlantic Trends poll revealed that 41% of Western European respondents stated "... they would abandon policies Russia opposes, such as NATO enlargement, to secure energy supplies. ... while only 26% in the USA agreed. ..."⁴⁶ Only 28% of Central and Eastern European nations said that they would abandon policies Russia opposes such as NATO enlargement, to secure energy supplies.⁴⁷ The Bulgarians, Poles, Romanians, and Slovaks took the hardest stance on this matter.⁴⁸ A recent poll suggests that Ukraine's desire to join NATO has waned while a majority of those polled Georgians still aspire to join NATO.⁴⁹

The review and analysis of the culled polls includes a surprise finding. After NATO had been in Afghanistan for more than seven years with mixed results, coupled with NATO's long history as a European-focused defensive alliance, it would appear that NATO member-states' populations would be reluctant to act outside of Europe. Fascinatingly, a reviewed poll's findings counter this assumption. A 2010 Transatlantic Trends survey determined that

... majorities or pluralities in all countries [several NATO member countries] surveyed still supported NATO being prepared to act outside Europe. Large majorities in the United States (77%) and the EU (62%) said that NATO should be prepared to act outside of Europe to defend members from threats to their security. ... The countries where only a plurality – rather than a majority – supported this were Turkey (48%),

Bulgaria (45%), and Romania (42%). When asked whether NATO should limit its mission to defending members attached in Europe, only one-in-three EU respondents (32%) and one-in-five Americans (21%) agreed. Germany (41%), the U.K. (38%), and Romania (37%) were the most supportive of limiting NATO's mission to act within Europe's borders.⁵⁰

The findings that large majorities of NATO member-states' populations support the use of NATO outside of Europe to defend NATO member-states from threats to their security is very significant, as often, current global threats are transnational and may not permanently emanate from Europe. It is often difficult for leaders to convince their populations that employing forces outside of Europe is worthwhile, or necessary. This is partly because external threats are not always immediately or easily identified, or well understood. A lack of understanding can undermine public support for military operations outside of Europe.

Furthermore, such a finding would suggest that there may be support for the use of NATO to provide security and protection for non-NATO member nations outside of Europe. This may be particularly true if such assistance is deemed as being in the security interests of NATO member-states. NATO has the capacity to project power beyond Europe, as has been recently demonstrated in NATO's military operations in Libya and Afghanistan.

The fact that 77% of American respondents believed that NATO should act outside of Europe is less remarkable, as America has acted militarily outside of Europe in recent years and has encouraged NATO to do so. While Turkey was not alone (Bulgaria and Romania, too, were out of step with the rest of NATO member-states), it was again out of step with its NATO partners.⁵¹ Only 48% of Turks believed that NATO should act outside of Europe while 62% of EU countries believed that NATO should act outside of Europe.⁵²

An overview of the polling data shows some trends regarding how NATO is perceived as being essential to security by populations. Nyiri's review of the long-term trends suggests that support for NATO has decreased over the years.⁵³ The decline should give NATO cause for concern. NATO's public support is crucial to its existence. If a steady erosion of public support for NATO persists, NATO risks its demise. As long as NATO member-states' populations believe that NATO is essential to their security, NATO's future should be secure.

Despite the declining trends, many available reviewed polls suggest that NATO is widely viewed as essential to its member-states' populations' security. There were two exceptions, Turkey and Poland.

The most recently reviewed poll (2011 Transatlantic Trends poll) found that, "Despite outgoing U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' harsh words about the future of NATO, a solid majority in both the EU and the United States reported that they see NATO as essential for their security. . ."⁵⁴ The poll revealed that "NATO is still seen as essential by 62% of both EU and U.S. respondents."⁵⁵ This is a very important finding. Such findings confound many opinions held following the Cold War, which predicted that NATO had outlived its utility. Despite the 2011 Transatlantic Trends poll, which found that 62% of Americans believed that NATO was still essential to their security, a Rasmussen poll taken on June 14, 2011, during NATO's involvement in Libya, found that more than half of Americans believed that the U.S. should not be in NATO.⁵⁶ The suggestion is that specific incidents may affect how publics see NATO.

Another very important finding in the 2011 Transatlantic Trends poll is that a majority of the polled NATO member-states viewed defense spending as more

important than other government spending.⁵⁷ This would suggest that NATO member countries still view their security as being a top priority, many years after the Cold War. It would also suggest that publics do see value in NATO and they support NATO. If true, this would bode well for NATO's future. Nine of the fourteen countries "... surveyed, [had] a plurality of respondents [that] wanted to reduce government spending. However, when asked about defense spending in particular, in ten of the 14 countries, a plurality wanted to maintain current levels of military outlays."⁵⁸ This finding was also remarkable, particularly after the recent European debt crisis.

There are positive trends for 2010 and 2011, as one looks at NATO support. The belief that NATO has been viewed largely as vital to NATO member-states' citizens' security is reinforced by Stefanie Babst's comments, with two exceptions, one being Turkey, and the other Poland. In 2011, a poll found similar findings regarding Turkey.

As international and national surveys show, NATO is widely associated with security and defense and perceived as a transatlantic provider of peace and security. According to the Transatlantic Trends survey that the German Marshall Fund published on 15 September [2010], majorities (59%) in 11 European NATO member countries and the United States (60%) still believe that NATO is essential for their security. The exception is Turkey where only 30% believe NATO is essential.⁵⁹

In contrast to the responses provided by the U.S. and EU states, the 2011 Transatlantic Trends survey revealed that Turkish respondents' view that NATO is critical to Turkey's security has declined significantly over the period 2002 through 2011.⁶⁰ At its high point in 2002, 59% of Turkish respondents believed that NATO was essential to Turkey's security, while in 2011; only 37% believed that NATO was essential to Turkey's security.⁶¹ In 2010, only 30% of Turkish respondents viewed NATO as essential to their security.⁶² Earlier, in 2009, only 35% of "... Turks thought

NATO essential to Turkey's security, down from more than half (53%) who so valued NATO in 2004."⁶³

Polling data from a 2011 Transatlantic Trends poll offer some suggestions as to why Turkey appears to be less inclined to see NATO as essential to Turkey's security.⁶⁴ "A plurality of the Turks considered Turkey's neighbors in the Middle East as more important to the country's economic interests (43%) and security interests (42%) than countries of the EU."⁶⁵ Turkish public opinion regarding its Middle East neighbors as the most important countries for Turkey's security appears to have begun firmly taking hold in 2010.⁶⁶ "Compared with the previous year's results [2009], the percentage of Turks who said Turkey should act in closest cooperation [with its Middle East neighbors] on international matters doubled to 20%."⁶⁷

Turkey's frustrated efforts to join the EU may also factor into Turks' views regarding the essentiality of NATO to Turkey's security. In 2004, 73% of the Turkish public viewed joining the EU as a good thing, however, by 2010, the support had eroded to 38%.⁶⁸ Turkey may feel less reliant on NATO for its security because Turkey has the largest active military in NATO-Europe (612,900).⁶⁹ Additionally, a majority of Turks (60%) view economic power as more important than military power.⁷⁰

A study conducted by the Betam Research Center at Istanbul's Bahcesehir University looked more closely at multiple Transatlantic Trends surveys' findings (2004-2010) regarding the Turks' responses. The Betam's study offers insight for the Turkish trends regarding whether NATO is essential to Turkey's security. Marc Champion studied the results. Champion concluded that the Turks who have swung the least against NATO are those who vote for Turkey's Islamic bent government, which is led by

the Justice and Development Party, or more commonly known as the AK Party.⁷¹ This finding is quite remarkable, as one would assume that an “Islamic leaning party” would be less apt to support “Western” NATO.

Champion’s analysis revolved around the question whether NATO membership was essential to Turkey’s security.⁷²

Asked in 2004 whether NATO membership was essential to Turkey’s security, 24% of voters for the severely nationalist Nationalist Movement Party, or MHP, said ‘No’, compared with 32% of AK Party voters. Asked the same question in 2010, 72% of MHP voters and 52% of AK Party supporters said ‘No’.⁷³

The fact that Turks do not consistently see NATO as essential to their security is very troublesome. Turkish and NATO leaders must work harder to convince the Turkish population that NATO is essential to their security. Failure to do so could result in further estrangement from NATO, while pushing Turkey into a more Middle East orientation, and a less European/NATO orientation. NATO has been heavily reliant on Turkey for NATO’s basing and staging. Turkey’s militarily important strategic location is vital to NATO’s power projection capability. Turkey’s proximity to Iraq, Syria, Russia, Iran, and others heighten Turkey’s profound importance to NATO and the global community, as the global community seeks to respond to security threats and crises. Turkey has emerged as a pivotal player in its region. It can bring much to bear on regional conflicts. Furthermore, Turkey is one of the NATO members who “shares” nuclear weapons with other NATO member-states.

Estonia, a NATO member-state, is a former Eastern Bloc country that sees NATO as a guarantor of its security.⁷⁴ In a Saar Poll, conducted in October 2011, 65% of Estonians see NATO membership as the most important factor guaranteeing their security.⁷⁵ The Estonian Ministry of Defense commissioned this poll.⁷⁶ The respondents

were between the ages of 15 and 74.⁷⁷ The Estonian poll allows for a more inclusive population than did the other cited polls, as the Estonian poll included ages 15-17, whereas the Transatlantic Trends' polls' respondents consisted of 18 years old and older. This survey provided some insight as to what Estonians view as other important factors for their security. Regrettably, the other reviewed polls did not offer other factors. Thirty one percent of the poll's respondents cited membership in the European Union as another significant factor in safeguarding Estonia's security.⁷⁸ Estonians also cited other factors for their security. "For the public, other significant factors for safeguarding security . . . included Estonian-Russian cooperation and good-neighborly relations (30%) and the development of Estonia's independent defense capability (30%)."⁷⁹

Another poll (the 2010 Transatlantic Trends poll) found that a firm majority of American (60%) and EU (59%) respondents believed ". . . that NATO was essential for their country's security, and these numbers increased by five points in Eastern Europe."⁸⁰ The Eastern European increase is made more interesting, as Poland's numbers were lower than the Western European NATO member-states' and Eastern European NATO member nations' numbers. The increased Eastern European NATO member-states numbers are encouraging. This would suggest that NATO has provided these states the sense of security that they sought after the end of the Cold War. Regrettably, Poland was the one exception.

In the 2010 Transatlantic Trends poll, Poland was the least likely member in the EU to state that NATO was essential to its security.⁸¹ Poland was a member of the Warsaw Pact. A slight majority of the Polish public (52%) believed that NATO remained essential to their security in 2010.⁸² In 2002, 64% of Poles believed that NATO was

essential to their security.⁸³ By 2007, only 46% viewed NATO as essential to their security.⁸⁴ This finding is fascinating. A former Warsaw Pact member now sees NATO as less essential to its security than do Western European NATO member-states. What is also astounding is that Poland is a Russian neighbor, and does not feel as strongly as EU nations that NATO is essential to Poles' security. One would assume that a close neighbor of Russia, which has been intermittently viewed as a threat to its neighbors, would be more likely than a Western European NATO member-state to see Russia as a threat.

Despite the steady view that NATO was essential to the security of NATO member-states from 2002 to 2011, 2006 showed some alarming drops in this perception. 2006 is offered for review because it was the year that showed the most declines from historically strong supporters of NATO. In 2006, a Transatlantic Trends survey found that the percentage of Europeans who agreed that NATO was essential to their nation's security declined every year since 2002, from a robust 69% to 55% in 2006.⁸⁵

Interestingly enough, the greatest declines came from countries which were historically perceived as strong supporters of NATO, i.e. Germany's support dropped from 74% in 2002, to 56% in 2006.⁸⁶ Italy's support fell from 68% to 52%.⁸⁷ Poland and Turkey's drop in support of the view that NATO was critical to their nation's security was the worst. Poland's support dropped from 64% in 2002 to a woeful 48% in 2006, and Turkey plummeted from 53% in 2004 to 44% in 2006.⁸⁸ The available data do not show specific causes for the drops. It is worth noting that polling in 2010 and 2011 revealed

that Turkey and Poland's belief that NATO was not essential to their security was also below U.S. and other NATO member-states averages.

NATO has served well as a guarantor of the security and defense of many European nations for the past 60-plus years. One of the greatest perpetual challenges for NATO is the need to convince NATO member-state populations that NATO is essential for their security. Thus far, polling data are encouraging. Efforts to ensure that populations know and believe that NATO is essential must, however, remain a priority for NATO country leaders. Failure to do so may put NATO at risk of fulfilling the many prophecies of its demise, in a very tumultuous, complex, and dangerous global security environment.

Endnotes

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